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SUBJECT: YOUTH LEADER "DISAPPOINTED" WITH MILITARY JUNTA

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

11. (S) SUMMARY. A key youth leader who has been working with the military junta since the coup was in the early planning stages says he is "disappointed" with the result. He commented at length about the new cabinet (septel), asserting that cabinet members are closely tied to CNDD president Moussa Dadis Camara, and that the prime minister does not have any real power. Contact claimed that a Malinke clan headed by the president of the CENI (National Independent Electoral Commission) is maneuvering behind the scenes to manipulate the political situation. He was concerned about civil society unity, but equally adamant that his vision is the one that should be implemented. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) On January 15, Poloff met with Thierno Balde, a local youth leader who has been working in an advisory capacity with the military junta. Thierno initially attempted to launch a youth movement in September, but when it failed, started collaborating with members of the 19th promotion on a plan to seize power in a military coup d'etat. That plan was successfully executed on December 23 just a few hours after the death of President Conte.

A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED...

13. (S) Commenting on the recent cabinet announcements (septel), Thierno told Poloff "I am a little disappointed...I thought things would be different." Elaborating, he said that the "system" remains the same with individuals maneuvering behind the scenes for personal gain. He commented on the new minister of justice as an example, saying that he is someone who is closely associated with junta leader Moussa Dadis Camara. "They are both from the Forest and he has direct access to the president," he said. Later, Thierno said that he himself had been expecting to be named to a ministerial position because Dadis had told him as much, but he did not make the list.

14. (S) Thierno was particularly surprised at the choice for the new minister of finance. He commented that he is very young, a captain, with very little practical experience for the job. Laughing in apparent disbelief, Thierno said "I just saw him yesterday and we exchanged contact information, but I didn't even bother to keep his phone number because I thought he was nobody...now he is a minister."

LINKS TO DADIS

15. (S) According to Thierno, the cabinet list is dominated by people with direct links to Dadis. "This is Dadis' government, not the prime minister's," he said, although he noted that the new minister of mines might be an exception

since he is unknown to Dadis. Continuing, he said that he did not care whether or not Dadis appointed friends and relatives to cabinet positions as long as they were qualified, but that many of the nominees are clearly unprepared for their jobs. Thierno added that Dadis relies heavily on the advice of those around him. "If he gets good advice, he listens, but if he gets bad advice...well, he listens to that too," Thierno said.

CNDD EXPECTED TO EXPAND

¶6. (SBU) Thierno told Poloff that the CNDD intends to expand its ranks soon, and that a list of more than 100 additional nominees is currently circulating. Dadis reportedly looked at the list but then rejected it because he saw names that he disagreed with. Thierno said his own name is on the list, but that he does not know if it will be on the final list.

NEED FOR PRESSURE

¶7. (S) Referring to the international community, Thierno repeatedly emphasized the importance of exerting pressure on the CNDD to organize elections. "We are going to have Dadis for 20 years if we are not careful...the prime minister has no real authority," Thierno said. Poloff outlined the USG position, emphasizing that legislative elections need to take place within six months. Thierno disagreed, saying that twelve months was more realistic because the constitution

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would need to be revised first. Acknowledging the need for constitutional reform, Poloff encouraged Thierno to hold off on addressing the issue until after the elections, pointing out that such an initiative could potentially take months. Thierno was convinced that constitutional reform was necessary, and that it could "easily" be completed within three months.

THE MALINKE "CLAN"

¶8. (S) With respect to elections, Thierno mentioned Ben Sekou Syllah, the president of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) as a major problem. "I don't trust Ben," he said, adding "it was Ben who went to Dadis and asked that the CENI be placed directly under the CNDD with complete authority to manage elections." (COMMENT. This decision has raised a number of concerns among civil society contacts. END COMMENT).

¶9. (S) Thierno said that Ben Syllah privately told Dadis that it would be impossible to organize elections in less than twelve months, but that Dadis should just throw out a date to appease the international community. "This is what we have been doing all along," he said, citing Cote d'Ivoire as another example of a place where this strategy has worked. Thierno pointed out that the CNDD had transferred funds for voter registration to Kankan, which is heavily populated with Malinkes, just three days after the coup. "Why did they send money only to Kankan when the voter registration process was blocked everywhere else in the country too?" Thierno questioned.

¶10. (S) According to Thierno, a civil society "clan" consisting mostly of Malinkes is trying to manipulate the political situation for personal benefit. He identified Ben Sekou Syllah, Bakary Fofana (head of an NGO and consultant to IFES), Hadja Saran Daraba (head of an NGO), and union leader Dr. Ibrahima Fofana as core members of this group. He also linked rival youth leader Dansa Kourouma to this group. Thierno said that Major Keletigui Faro, the Secretary General

of the Presidency, is also linked to the clan. Thierno said that he has been repeatedly marginalized by this group by being intentionally left out of key discussions and otherwise circumvented.

¶11. (SBU) As the meeting drew to a close, Thierno said "you know, this is not at all what I was hoping for, but we are not without hope." He again stressed the need for international pressure. Poloff agreed, noting that such pressure is in place, but that strong civil leadership pushing a unified strategic vision is vitally important to ensuring success.

COMMENT

¶12. (S) Thierno has been all over the map in recent months, first talking about a civil movement, then collaborating clandestinely with the military, later deciding again that a civil movement was a smarter choice, and now working with the military junta as a consultant. His comments need to be taken with a grain of salt, but he does have useful insights into what may be happening behind the scenes. Thierno frequently highlights ethnic divisions, which he may be overestimating as his views do not necessarily reflect the information Embassy is hearing from a range of other sources. Thierno also seems convinced that he has the "right" answer for Guinea, which may make it difficult for him to work collaboratively with others who have different views. Although he understands that civil society needs to be more unified, he also stubbornly clings to his own vision of what needs to be done. Thierno harbors his own political ambitions as well and may be a bit put out that he did not get a ministerial position. END COMMENT.
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